HIGHLIGHTS OF THE
Speech From The Throne
THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2003

Her Honour

The Honourable Myra A. Freeman, O.N.S., B.A., B.Ed
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF NOVA SCOTIA

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Third Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly

A proud past ... a confident future

Our province has established a reputation as a leader on many fronts. Tourists come here from around the world. We are gaining a new and impressive resumé for hosting major national and international events. And some of the world's most progressive and successful companies are making Nova Scotia their new home.

Our plan is to continue to build a healthier, better educated, and more prosperous Nova Scotia.

Better care, faster care

Recently, government released *Your Health Matters*, a comprehensive plan that will mean better health care for all Nova Scotians. It includes, but is not limited to, a commitment to:

- Provide our hospitals with stable, predictable funding over several years.
- More money to train nurses, doctors, and medical laboratory technicians.
- Reduced wait times.

- A new Office of Health Promotion, with programs to support healthy living.
- Additional measures to support seniors living in long-term care.
- More supports for Nova Scotians needing mental health services.
- More money to help seniors manage the high cost of prescription drugs.
- More money for Home Care.
- New financial incentives and new measures to support family caregivers.

A better start ... a more promising future

Government has been working to help our youngest children get off to a better start and our older children and adult learners off to a more promising future. That is why we:

- Released Learning for Life, a plan that focuses on the basics first, with smaller class sizes in the critical early years as well as more books, math tools, computers, teachers, and specialists.
- Announced a new debt-management plan to help post-secondary students manage the cost of a post-secondary education.
- Announced more money to support our universities.
- Announced additional investments in the Nova Scotia Community College.
- Are improving and expanding access to apprenticeship programs.
- Continuing to invest in the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning.

A new age of prosperity

A growing economy allows us to invest more in our families' priorities. Since 1999, 26,000 new jobs have been created. With a balanced budget and a strategy to generate new investment, new jobs, and new growth, Nova Scotia's future has never looked better. We will:

- Introduce Nova Scotia's second balanced budget in a row.
- Lower taxes.
- Help small business by bringing Nova Scotia's Small Business Tax threshold in line with the most recent federal budget.
- Provide more support for research and innovation by doubling In*NOVA*corp's "Nova Scotia First Fund."
- Enhance our business retention and expansion program.
- Introduce *Brand Nova Scotia* to promote our province as a place to live, work, and raise a family.
- Make new investments to improve our roads, highways, and bridges.
- Work to create a Capital District Transportation Authority to help resolve the capital region's transportation issues.

Protecting what we value

Our health and prosperity are always linked to our environment. Our province must meet the challenges of continued growth, while protecting and preserving Nova Scotia's natural beauty. To achieve this we will:

- Work with the federal government and the local community to turn the Sydney Tar Ponds into an historic environmental achievement.
- Invest in clean harbours for the people of Halifax, Lunenberg, and Sydney and continue to provide better water and sewer services across the province.
- Introduce a new code of forest practice as part of our forest strategy.
- Adopt a new Agricultural Policy Framework to support farm families.
- Improve the quality of Nova Scotia's water through our *Water Strategy*.
- Improve the quality of Nova Scotia's air through our *Energy Strategy*.

Reaching out to families, rewarding sacrifice, renewing our commitments ...

Our growing economy means more than just better health, education, and roads. Our growing economy provides us the means to reward sacrifice, reach out to families in need, and renew our commitment to our children and their future. As part of this commitment we will:

- Work with our housing partners and the federal government to build or renovate at least 1,500 affordable housing units.
- Improve access to justice by increasing our support for Legal Aid.

- Introduce legislation to ensure our firefighters are compensated for cancer and other diseases related to their service.
- Take steps to address the high cost of automobile insurance.

Much has been accomplished, more is to come

From health care, to education, to economic growth, government has introduced plans that will lead to a better future for you and your children.

Nova Scotians now benefit from a balanced budget.

Soon they will be benefitting from lower taxes.

And while much has been accomplished, there is much more to do.

Our government's commitment is to continue to work with Nova Scotians to promote our advantages... build on our progress and protect what we value.

www.gov.ns.ca/legi/housedir/lieutgov.htm

Speech From The Throne

Thursday, March 27, 2003

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Lieutenant Governor

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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF NOVA SCOTIA

For the Third Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly
Nova Scotia House of Assembly

Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies, and gentlemen:

At this time of great unease in the world, my government asks that we stand for a moment of prayer and reflection.

That we pray peace soon prevails.

That we reflect on how fortunate we are to live in a peaceful province, in a peaceful country, where people of every nation, every colour, and every belief are welcomed into our homes and into our communities.

(Moment of silence)

Thank you.

Reason to be proud

Nova Scotians have reason to be proud. Proud of our history, our culture, our spectacular scenery.

Most of all we have reason to be proud of ourselves.

For a small province we are making big inroads on many fronts. In the life and ocean sciences, in the world of information technology, in the arts, in business and industry, in preserving and protecting our environment.

We are a talented, capable, and caring people living in the best province, in the best country in the world. A fact recounted by so many people who come here. Those who have come here time and time again by choice; those who have arrived unexpectedly through terrible circumstance.

On September 11, 2001—a day of great sadness and madness in the world—there was also simple goodness, and it could be found right here in the people of Nova Scotia.

Thank you, Nova Scotia

From the firefighters from Cumberland County who packed up their gear and headed to Ground Zero the moment they heard the terrible news, to the hundreds of professionals who freely worked round the clock, to the thousands of Nova Scotians who offered their homes and opened their hearts to anxious, weary strangers. Nova Scotians did their province and their country proud.

My government, once again, extends a sincere thank you to everyone who lent a helping hand.

My government also extends its deep gratitude to those who are working to ensure we never again experience the horrors of 9-11. To the men and women who served in Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf, and who are now serving in the Middle East, we are grateful for your sacrifice, your commitment, and your courage.

To the families of Private Nathan Smith and Private Richard Green, Nova Scotia will remember its lost sons for their service to their country and for their brave efforts to protect the world from terror.

We also remember the late Edmund Morris, Big Donnie MacLeod, Gerald Ritcey, George Riley and Gerald Wambolt: Nova Scotians who dedicated countless hours and untold efforts to the betterment of their communities, and their province, through public office and private life.

Our province also lost many other talented Nova Scotians who served their province with great passion and quiet pride. Among them, Larry Uteck, Kate Carmichael, Justice Ted Flinn, Dr. Ruth Johnson, Jean Shaw, Dr. Carrie Best, Grace Gosse, Harvey Webber, Melodie Elliott Clark, and George Christie.

Nova Scotians were also saddened by the death of Harold Long: a great friend to this Legislature as its Sergeant-at-Arms for 31 years. The longest-serving Sergeant-at-Arms in the history of the Commonwealth.

As well, we remember the Right Honourable Ray Hnatyshyn as a man who so humbly but proudly served his country as Canada's 24th Governor General and the late John Shaffner, Nova Scotia's Lieutenant Governor.

My government also gratefully acknowledges the outstanding contributions made by Nova Scotia's first inductees to the Order of Nova Scotia. As well, we salute the men and women who have been honoured as Nova Scotia's recipients of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, a special tribute for deserving Nova Scotians given in honour of the 50th anniversary of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

On behalf of the people of Nova Scotia, my government once again extends its deepest sympathies to the Royal Family on the passing of Her Royal Highness The Princess Margaret and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother.
Our beloved Queen Mum.

A Proud Past ... A Confident Future

Reason to be confident

Nova Scotians have the right to be proud and good reason to be confident.

Look at what we are doing. Consider what we are about to do.

The World Junior Hockey Championship exceeded all expectations. The East Coast Music Awards were the best ever, and the Nokia Brier was a great success.

Soon, Nova Scotia will, once again, be centre stage as host of the 2003 World Theatre Festival, and at centre ice when the puck drops for the 2004 Women's World Hockey Championships.

We will also welcome tens of thousands of visitors to Nova Scotia as we begin a three-year celebration of the proud history, rich culture, and tremendous contributions of Nova Scotia's Acadians.

Dozens of events are already planned from Argyle to Arichat. And next summer, as the centrepiece of our Acadian celebrations and in recognition of the 400th anniversary of European settlement in our province, Nova Scotia will host the Congrès mondial acadien. We will also, once again welcome, the barques and brigs, the square-riggers and schooners, as the Tall Ships sail back to Nova Scotia for the second time in four years.

Nova Scotia shines with talent

This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Nova Scotia International Tattoo. Through pipes and drums, stories and song, the Tattoo has introduced thousands of people the world over to Nova Scotia's proud military history, our musical talent, our culture, and our character.

Whether it's the International Tattoo, Celtic Colours, the Antigonish Highland Games, or so many other world-class attractions and first-class events, Nova Scotia shines, not just with talent, but with well-deserved pride.

So Much within Reach

My government believes that confidence breeds success. We further believe that Nova Scotia's future success will not be limited by our abilities, but only by our imaginations.

Just imagine!

We imagine a day when more Nova Scotians are packing their bags—not to leave—but to come home; home to a good, steady job, to homes burning Nova Scotia gas, to healthy, safe schools that inspire a never-ending love of learning.

We imagine a day when the parent of every newborn has the support they need to help their son or daughter get off to a healthy start, when every child can read by grade 1, and every young Nova Scotian learns a trade or earns a degree that leads to a good job right here at home.

We imagine a day when adult illiteracy is a thing of the past, when every Nova Scotian has access to a family doctor, when there is no such thing as a child with type II diabetes.

We imagine a day when our harbours are clean, and the last remnants of old industry are replaced by green space or office space; when you can drive from one end of Nova Scotia to the other on a single twinned highway.

We imagine a day when we are recognized as one of the world's foremost medical and research centres, when we are the country's number one tourist destination, when we are known as the music, film, and festival capital of Canada, and when the rest of the world turns to Nova Scotia as a leader in promoting healthy, safe, and sustainable communities.

We don't have to stretch our imaginations

We don't have to stretch our imaginations to see that these, and so many other things, are within reach.

What we must do is constantly remind ourselves of our own potential and tell the world about our many advantages.

We have to promote our advantages

Nova Scotia has the best-educated people in the country.

We have 10 universities, two among the best three in the country.

We have the Nova Scotia Community College with 13 campuses across the province providing state-of-the art training in over 100 programs.

We have medical and applied research facilities doing ground-breaking research in the areas of brain recovery, the life sciences, ocean sciences, and biogenetics.

We have two of the country's leading tertiary-care facilities, providing advanced care to families, women, and children.

We have the second-deepest, ice-free port in the world—with rail connections that can get products to major markets in the mid-US a full day faster than anywhere else on the eastern seaboard.

We're home to some of the world's most successful and progressive companies—Stanfields, Clearwater, High Liner Foods, Michelin, Tesma, Greenbrier, IMP Aerospace, Acadian Seaplants, Composites Atlantic, Register.com, Xerox, Convergys, Bowater, Kimberly-Clark, Stora—to name but a few.

We have a steady, reliable workforce.

We are the most connected province in the country, with high-speed Internet service within minutes of wherever you are.

Look at all we have ...
Look at all we do

We have first-class hotels, world-class resorts, great theatre, fabulous music, incredible scenery, and a vibrant flourishing culture.

We have all of this, and so much more.

Most of all, we have people who know and care about their neighbours.

Nova Scotians volunteer more of their time to help the elderly, the sick, the poor, and those in need of care and comfort than any other Canadians.

Something that speaks volumes about our character, our way of life—about our values.

Values my government shares with Nova Scotians.

Values like helping those in need, living within our means, doing what we say we will do, and expecting more of ourselves and each other.

Everything we have, and all that we are, position Nova Scotia to be so much more than it already is.

My government's commitment is to continue to work with you to promote our advantages, build on our progress, and protect what we value.

A modern, diverse economy

My government's commitment is to continue to grow a modern, diverse economy so we can continue to invest in a better future for you and your children.

Nova Scotians have every right to be proud and very good reason to be confident.

Because we've turned the corner.

We've Turned the Corner

Last year my government introduced the first truly balanced budget in 40 years. A major milestone that lifted a heavy millstone that was weighing us down and holding us back.

And despite a stubborn debt that has grown after 40 years of overspending, Nova Scotia's strong economy is slowly but surely leading to the day when it too will be gone.

My government will continue to put in place the fiscal, economic, and social conditions that are needed to ensure the debt becomes less and less onerous.

Securing your children's future

My government will continue to take the necessary steps so your children's future is more secure.

We will do so by continuing to do what we have in each and every year of our mandate. We will invest more in health, education, and roads.

We will do so by continuing to reduce the regulatory burden on business, and by supporting Nova Scotians who have good ideas—see them become a reality.

We will do so by launching a major new marketing effort that promotes Nova Scotia, not just as a place to visit, but as a home to invest and succeed.

We will do so by tabling the second balanced budget in a row.

A home to invest and succeed

And we will do so by lowering your taxes.

These are the conditions for prosperity we spoke of in 1999.

These are the conditions we have worked hard to achieve.

Most of all, these are the conditions that attract investment, create new jobs, and generate the revenues needed to pay for better services in future.

Back-to-back balanced budgets

Lower taxes not only mean Nova Scotians get to keep more of what they earn. Lower taxes will make the difference between whether your child decides on a passport to somewhere else, or a place to live here in Nova Scotia.

Because lower taxes help working families, they grow our economy, they are part of our plan, and they work.

Lower taxes

And lower taxes will not come at the expense of a balanced budget. They will not come at the expense of better health care, better education, or better roads. On the contrary, lower taxes will lead to better health care for all, a better education for your child, and better roads for everyone.

A competitive economy

Lower taxes will lead to an economy that is competitive and a future that is more secure.

The status quo will just mean others pull ahead, while we slip behind.

My government knows the status quo is not a real option.

My government also knows that what Nova Scotians want more than anything else is the assurance that when they need health care—or when someone they care about needs health care—it will be there for them.

And it will.

Better Care ... Faster Care

More nurses, doctors, shorter wait lists

Better health care will be there in the form of more nurses at the bedside, more doctors in rural communities, more and better medical equipment, faster access to information, and shorter wait lists.

It will be there in the form of more health-care dollars, and stable, predictable funding, leading to better planning, better management, and better care.

Better health care will be there in the form of more guidance and support for new parents, more opportunities for young Nova Scotians to be physically active, and better services to support children and youth deal with emotional or behavioural problems.

These are the requirements for a healthier Nova Scotia we spoke of in 1999.

These are the measures we have been working hard to put in place.

These are the priorities for a healthier Nova Scotia we will continue to build on.

Presently, Nova Scotia has the second-highest doctor to patient ratio in the country. Over the last four years, Nova Scotians have benefitted from a net gain of 199 new doctors.

We also have more nurses per capita than most provinces. In the last year alone, we recruited more than 100 nurses from outside of Nova Scotia.

Yet more needs to be done to ensure we have the right number and mix of health-care professionals to meet Nova Scotia's future needs.

Your Health Matters

Recently, my government released *Your Health Matters*, a comprehensive plan that builds on the significant progress already made in training, recruiting, and retaining more nurses through Nova Scotia's Nursing Strategy—more doctors through our physician recruitment efforts.

Our plan means more nurses, doctors, and medical laboratory technologists will be trained. Our plan also includes incentives so more graduates stay in Nova Scotia to care for you.

It also identifies how our health-care providers can work better together, including expanding the number of community clinics where nurses, doctors, nurse practitioners, paramedics, and others work side by side to deliver smarter, better care.

Our plan also means Nova Scotia's health-care professionals will have the medical equipment, the advanced technology, and the information needed to diagnose and treat you faster, so you can get back on your feet, back to work, and back to your families faster.

Helping you stay healthy

But our plan isn't just about treating you in hospital when you're sick. It's about doing more to help you stay healthy.

Our new Office of Health Promotion is spearheading a number of new efforts to improve the health and fitness of Nova Scotians, particularly young Nova Scotians. *Healthy Beginnings, Active Kids Healthy Kids*, the *Sport Futures Leadership Program*, our *Tobacco Control Strategy*, and new efforts to encourage healthy eating habits in school and at home, will lead to healthier kids and a healthier, more productive province.

From the parents of newborns to the children of aging parents, my government is making the kind of investments that will lead to greater security and greater peace of mind for Nova Scotians in need of care.

My government recently announced an additional $10 million to help seniors better manage the high cost of prescription drugs.

More support for seniors

We also protected more of the assets of seniors in long-term care, lightening the financial burden faced by the 20 per cent of residents who contribute to their own care. And soon, we will announce another important step in our plan to fully assume the health-care costs for all seniors living in nursing homes.

More support for family caregivers

As well, new investments in home care and additional support for family caregivers will soon mean more Nova Scotians get the support they need to continue to live at home. In addition to increasing financial incentives to support family caregivers, my government will take steps to protect the employment status of Nova Scotians who are providing care and comfort to Nova Scotians in the last stages of life. Legislation that mirrors proposed federal legislation will be introduced so that Nova Scotian families can spend more time with a loved one receiving palliative care at home.

Beyond the physical needs of Nova Scotians, is the need to do more to address the mental health and well-being of Nova Scotians.

Again, my government is leading in this important area.

More mental health services across Nova Scotia

Recently, Nova Scotia became the first province in the country to introduce comprehensive mental health standards for diagnosis and treatment. My government also announced two intensive care treatment teams for children and youth, along with a new mental health residential treatment facility.

My government knows there are no borders or boundaries when it comes to Nova Scotians needing mental health services. We will therefore expand the range and quality of services from one end of Nova Scotia to the other with additional money this year for more professionals in each of our district health authorities.

Health care will be there

Despite the huge pressures brought on by our aging population, by a global shortage of health-care professionals, and by the increasing costs of prescription drugs, my government is responding in a way that will ensure when you need health care—when someone you care about needs health care—it will be there for you.

Health care will be there for you.

And so will a better education for your child.

A Better Start ... A More Promising Future

My government knows that more than anything else, the key to Nova Scotia's future success is the investments we make in our children today.

Putting the basics first ... supporting learning success

That is why we released *Learning for Life*, a plan that provides more one-on-one teaching time in the critical early years through smaller class sizes. A plan that will see more teachers and specialists, more books, math tools, and computers in our schools.

A plan that puts the basics first, so that over time, Nova Scotia's students come second to no one.

Our plan also means parents will have more and better information to determine the progress of their child, including a new common report card that clearly measures every child's progress against expected results.

More accountability

We are also taking action to involve parents in a more meaningful way through efforts to strengthen their role on school advisory councils. As well, we are taking steps to improve individual school performance, with the longer-term goal of establishing a province-wide system for school accreditation.

More learning tools and professional support

More teaching time in math and language arts, new grammar handbooks to support effective communication, more professional development for our teachers, and more professional staff to support students with special needs—these are just a few of the new initiatives my government is taking to support your child's success, not just in school but in life.

Healthier schools

And just as we have over the last three years, my government will continue to invest in healthy, safe places to learn, with significant new dollars for new school construction, renovations, and repairs.

My government is working to ensure our youngest students get off to a good start. We're also working hard to ensure our older students get off to a promising future.

More opportunities leading to success

Over the past three years, my government opened up hundreds of new opportunities for young Nova Scotians to go to community college. As well, we expanded and improved access to more apprenticeship programs through the Virtual campus of the Nova Scotia Community College.

But still too many are waiting for their chance to learn a trade, develop the skills, or gain the knowledge they need to find a good job.

Our growing and changing economy means Nova Scotia is facing skill shortages, not just in emerging technologies but in the traditional trades.

My government will continue to work with industry, business, labour, and all of our partners in education, so that existing business can continue to grow—so that new investment dollars come to Nova Scotia—so that Nova Scotians are first in line to fill the jobs of the future.

Investing in education—a down payment on a better future

Tomorrow, my government will release details on one of the single biggest investments ever made in post-secondary education in Nova Scotia. More than an investment in education, it will be a down payment on a better future for all Nova Scotians.

My government is also adding to the investments we have made in our universities. Again this year, my government will build on our efforts to restore the deep funding cuts made in the mid-1990s.

This, along with our recently announced student debt-assistance plan, will help contain rising tuitions and make the cost of post-secondary education more manageable for Nova Scotia students.

More support for post-secondary students, our universities, our community colleges

In addition to new investments in P–12, our community colleges, and universities, my government will continue to expand and improve Nova Scotia's apprenticeship programs. We will introduce a new apprenticeship act and provide Nova Scotians greater access to technical training from either home or work.

Our efforts to eliminate Nova Scotia's skills gap are not limited to young Nova Scotians. Nova Scotia's first School for Adult Learning is growing by leaps and bounds. As a result of this important initiative, over 4,000 Nova Scotians are improving their chance for a better future for themselves and their families.

Eliminating the skills gap

My government is responding to the need to get our youngest students off to a better start, to close the skills gap, and to eliminate adult illiteracy.

These are the requirements for a better future we spoke of in 1999.

These are the areas in which we are making significant investments.

These are the areas we will continue to build, so our economy continues to grow.

A New Age of Prosperity

A growing economy is crucial to ensuring we have the means to continue to invest in a healthier Nova Scotia and a better future for our children.

26,000 new jobs

Since 1999, 26,000 new jobs were created in Nova Scotia—80 per cent of them full-time jobs.

My government is committed to working with Nova Scotians to see this number grow. We are determined to set the stage for a new age of prosperity.

Back-to-back balanced budgets, better roads, a skilled workforce, reliable health care, and lower taxes are all key to growing a modern, progressive economy.

My government is delivering on all of these and much more.

Supporting innovation, building on success

New research dollars are helping our universities and research facilities turn innovative ideas into medical breakthroughs or commercial success stories.

Less red tape is making it faster for a new business to get started or easier for an existing business to expand.

Our economic growth and energy strategies are identifying new markets and new opportunities for Nova Scotia's traditional industries to expand or laying the foundation for emerging industries to flourish.

A good beginning my government will build on.

My government knows that Nova Scotia would not have such a promising oil and gas industry, such a growing information and technology sector, or such a strong tourism, film, or cultural presence, if it were not for the men and women who see a need, who take the risk, and who deliver the goods and services that are helping these industries expand and our economy grow.

Supporting small business

Small business is the backbone of the Nova Scotia economy.

To support existing small business, and to encourage new small business start-ups, my government will bring Nova Scotia's Small Business Tax threshold in line with the most recent federal budget.

Turning innovative ideas into success stories

We will also extend, amend, and improve existing vehicles for accessing venture capital, and seek new opportunities for business to acquire more working capital. For example, as announced earlier this week, my government is doubling the size of In*NOVA*corp's Nova Scotia First Fund. This fund is helping to transform innovative ideas into successful companies—opening up new markets and creating new jobs in the process.

My government will also cut more red tape.

Expanding markets at home and abroad

As well, we will continue to help struggling businesses succeed and successful companies grow. We will do more to help local business identify untapped opportunities for raising new capital, more to help Nova Scotian companies expand their markets both at home and abroad by expanding our *Business Retention and Expansion Program*.

New effort to promote our people, products, place, and performance

My government will also support small, medium, and large business by launching a major new marketing effort to promote the quality and range of Nova Scotia products, to bring more Nova Scotians back home, and more tourists from away. *Brand Nova Scotia* will let the world know that Nova Scotia is a

wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. It will also remind Nova Scotians why they have every right to feel proud and very good reason to feel confident.

And lower taxes will help every Nova Scotia business, whether it's a business of 3 or 300. Lower taxes will mean more Nova Scotians have more money to spend at the local hardware store or corner store. Lower taxes will mean Nova Scotia businesses have more money to invest in their own success.

Transportation is key

My government knows well that safe highways and good roads are vital, not just so you can get to work or get your child off to school safely, but because they are a must for getting our products to market and more tourists to visit.

Since 1999, my government has reversed the earlier cuts to our transportation budget that allowed our roads to fall into disrepair. To date, we have spent an additional $100 million to address what is clearly Nova Scotia's most pressing infrastructure need.

More of your tax dollars working for you

This year, Nova Scotians will see more of their taxes at work with another significant investment in safer roads, better bridges, and twinned highways.

As well, the people of Cape Breton will see rail service continue, and the people who fly in and out of Halifax, more improvements to Atlantic Canada's busiest airport.

My government knows that transportation is vital to a growing economy.

We also know that a major population boom in and around our capital city is creating unique transportation problems for the citizens of HRM, as well as the thousands of Nova Scotians who travel into Halifax for work every day from neighbouring counties.

My government will therefore work to create a Capital District Transportation Authority to identify new opportunities for resolving transportation issues within the capital region.

We will also work at creating a Provincial Capital Commission to examine ways to better protect Nova Scotia's valuable heritage sites, as well as to maximize the public benefit of provincially owned properties.

Reaching out to help communities grow

My government recognizes that rural Nova Scotia faces unique challenges of its own.

We also know that the best way to ensure every region of Nova Scotia benefits from the new opportunities of the future is to reach out to the people who know their communities best.

We will therefore hold a series of discussions with community leaders from across the province on issues vital to strengthening rural Nova Scotia. An initiative that will complement the efforts of Nova Scotia Business Incorporated, which is presently meeting with business men and women across the province to identify opportunities that lead to the future growth of our communities—the prosperity of all our people.

Supporting innovative ideas and rewarding initiative, building better roads and highways, and establishing the fiscal climate needed to promote Nova Scotia's economic well-being and social progress; these are the conditions for building a better future we spoke of in 1999.

These are the measures we have worked hard to put in place.

These are the things we will continue to deliver on—in a way that protects what we value.

Protecting What We Value

Nova Scotia is a beautiful package wrapped tight by the Atlantic Ocean.

From the spectacular view from atop MacKenzie Mountain, to the picturesque fishing villages along Nova Scotia's Acadian Shore, Nova Scotia is a wonderful mix of land and seascapes.

Blessings and challenges

We have mountains and valleys, rivers that run for miles, and lakes around practically every corner. We have great beaches and hiking trails, species in abundance ... species at risk.

But along with our natural blessings come new challenges. The challenge of redeeming industrial waste sites, of cleaning our harbours, renewing our forests, and protecting our farmlands.

Again, my government is responding.

Advancing the economic and social interests of Cape Breton

The stacks at Sysco are down, and a short list of real options for cleaning up the Sydney tarponds is in the hands of local residents. My government is determined to work with the federal government and the local community to turn one of Canada's worst toxic waste sites into one of the world's most successful environmental achievements, and in the process, advance the economic and social interests of the people of Cape Breton.

We will also continue to invest in clean harbours for the people of Halifax, Lunenburg, and Sydney, and better water and sewer services for Nova Scotians from one end of the province to the other.

Clean drinking water, environmentally safe farming, clean air, and smart forestry practices are all essential to our quality of life as well as our economic growth. Again, my government is responding.

Cleaner water, purer air

Our Water Strategy will mean our water is cleaner. Our Energy Strategy will mean our air is more pure.

We're looking at wind to fuel our turbines and clean gas to help fuel our economy.

As a result of a new, more reasonable, market-driven approach to gas distribution, Nova Scotia's offshore gas will soon come ashore, heating our homes and offices, and bringing new business, new industry, and new jobs to our province in the process.

Protecting our farmlands ... supporting farm families

Other initiatives, too, are helping protect our environment and support a growing and sustainable economy.

Our New Farm Entrants Program, a new focus on environmentally safe farming; and unprecedented levels of assistance for drought relief and crop insurance, are keeping our family farms in business and supporting a vital sector of our economy.

This year, my government will continue our efforts to support Nova Scotia's farming families by putting in place a new Agriculture Policy Framework that will give them greater security, greater peace of mind.

Replenishing our forests

We're also taking measures to ensure our forests continue to be a source of livelihood and pleasure for Nova Scotians. New partnerships have increased funding to replenish our forests and new measures have been taken to ensure smarter forest practices. And again, this year, and as part of our Forest Strategy, my government will introduce a new Code of Forest Practice.

Protecting our property ... preserving species at risk

My government has also entered into new partnership agreements with agencies such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited, committing more dollars to acquire more valuable coastal property, more dollars to protect species at risk.

As well, my government recently designated McNabs, and Lawlor Islands as a provincial park and acquired the spectacular lands of Cape Split for Nova Scotians to continue to enjoy for generations to come.

Reaching out to Families, Rewarding Sacrifice, Renewing our Commitments

Our growing economy not only means we can invest in better health care, better education, and better roads. Our growing economy gives us the means to reward sacrifice, to reach out to families in need, and to reinforce and renew our commitment to our children and their future.

Nova Scotia has shown vision and leadership by providing families, be they among the working poor, or the poor looking for work, more support in providing for their children. We eliminated the clawback on the National Child Benefit and extended Pharmacare coverage so families moving off welfare had time to get back on their feet.

We also opened up 400 full- and part-time day care spaces. As well, 200 subsidized and portable spaces mean that parents can move on to something better for themselves and their children, without wondering or worrying about whether or not quality day care will be there for their child.

Since 1999, these and other measures, along with our growing economy, have helped more than 9,000 Nova Scotians move away from income assistance and on to a new life of self-sufficiency.

Fewer Nova Scotians on welfare ... more finding independence

My government looks forward to building on the measures we have already taken to support families in need and to the new federal dollars promised for early childhood development, every cent of which we will use to support the healthy development of our children.

My government also welcomes Ottawa's contribution in support of our efforts to provide better housing for Nova Scotia's low- and modest-income earners. Over the next five years, Nova Scotia, along with its housing partners and the federal government, will spend a minimum of $38 million to build or renovate at least 1,500 affordable housing units.

New investments in affordable housing

While we welcome new federal dollars to support early childhood development and better, more-affordable housing, we remain disappointed with Ottawa's lack of commitment on many other fronts, including its failure to ensure Nova Scotians receive speedy justice.

More investments in speedy justice

My government will therefore make a significant investment to ensure justice is not denied because it is delayed. We will increase our contribution to the Nova Scotia Legal Aid Commission so that low-income Nova Scotians are not put at risk, or their access to justice put in jeopardy.

Fairness for firefighters

My government will also ensure Nova Scotia's firefighters are treated justly and fairly. Legislation will be introduced to ensure both professional and volunteer firefighters are compensated for cancer and other diseases resulting from on-the-job exposure to smoke and hazardous chemicals.

Fairness for consumers

We will also ensure Nova Scotia consumers are treated fairly. We know that the rising cost of automobile insurance is creating hardship for many Nova Scotians, particularly seniors, students, working families, and small business men and women. My government recently released a discussion paper, asking Nova Scotians for their input on ways to curtail or reduce insurance premiums. The results of these consultations will determine the future actions of my government.

My government is committed to advancing the economic and social interests of all Nova Scotians.

Since coming to government, we have increased support for Nova Scotians with physical disabilities, including making our public buildings and transportation services more accessible. But still more needs to be done, and will be done.

We have also expanded community-based supports for Nova Scotians with addictions and for families of children who are emotionally, behaviourally, or mentally challenged. But still more needs to be done, and will be done.

My government further understands that the future prosperity of Nova Scotia depends on the full and active participation of all of its citizens in the social and economic life of our province.

Every Nova Scotian counts

We recognize, as well, that this means doing more to support the ingenuity and progress of those who contribute so much to Nova Scotia's cultural diversity.

Last June, my government signed an historic agreement with Nova Scotia's 13 Mi'kmaq Chiefs and the federal government that started formal negotiations on treaty and treaty-related issues. This important step has helped rebuild our relationships with Nova Scotia's Aboriginal people and set the stage for resolving outstanding issues in a way that advances the interests of all Nova Scotians.

My government is also pleased to continue to work with Nova Scotia's African Canadian community in providing support for new business start-ups through the Black Business Initiative

We've made good progress in many areas, but we are by no means satisfied the job is near complete.

It's all about a better future

My government will continue to work at building a better future for you and a brighter future for your children.

These are the commitments we made in 1999.

These are the commitments we have been working hard to fulfil.

These are the commitments we will continue to build on.

Much Has Been Accomplished ... More Is to Come

In 1999 there was no plan to provide better health care.

There was no plan to improve education.

No plan to grow our economy.

The plans are under way ...

Today, we have plans for all of this and more.

And today, as promised, those plans are well under way, and the results are beginning to show.

The results are beginning to show ...

The deficit is gone; lower taxes are on the way.

More Nova Scotians are working; fewer are on welfare.

More roads are being fixed; more bridges are being repaired; more schools are being built.

There are more resources in our classrooms to support student success; more doctors and nurses to provide better care.

There is all of this and a lot more.

We didn't just imagine ...

My government didn't just imagine what was possible, we got to work to make it happen.

And while much has been accomplished, more needs to be done.

We worked to make Nova Scotia even better

My government is determined to continue to work with you to see that it does.

My government is determined to see that Nova Scotia, the best province, in the best country in the world, gets even better.

Thank you.

NOVA SCOTIA